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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT PASS TO USTR-AGAMA; USTDA-MARIN; EXIM-RICHTER
BAGHDAD FOR MCCULLOUGH
ROME PASS TO TSA - ANTHONY GIOVANNIELLO
DAKAR PASS TO FAA - MOIRA KEANE
DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION FOR FAA MEL CINTRON, AHARRIS
DOC FOR 3317/ITA/OA/KBURRESS AND 3130/USFC/OIO/ANESA/MCREED

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR REVIEWS ROBUST NEXT STEPS WITH AVIATION
MINISTER

REF: A. ABUJA 361
 [1](#)B. ABUJA 204
 [1](#)C. ABUJA 168
 [1](#)D. LAGOS 40
 [1](#)E. 08 ABUJA 2313
 [1](#)F. 08 ABUJA 2207
 [1](#)G. 08 ABUJA 194

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; BUSINESS PROPRIETARY INFORMATION; NOT
FOR DISSEMINATION OUTSIDE USG

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. The Ambassador met with the new Minister of Aviation Babtunde Omotoba on March 5 to advocate for new Delta Airline routes from Abuja to Atlanta and Lagos to New York and reviewed the multilateral Open Skies Agreement signed between the United States and Nigeria in 2000. Omotoba agreed to extending landing rights for the new routes if Delta provides overall better customer service to passengers to include upgrading planes with less modern amenities used on the route, reducing incidents of lost or missing luggage; and overall better passenger treatment. Omotoba complained that Delta was using antiquated planes on the existing Lagos to Atlanta flights. The Ambassador agreed to discuss with Delta on the subject of the Minister's complaints regarding its customer service. The Minister also agreed to an industry security meeting in March featuring speakers on security requirements from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Transportation Security Administration (TSA); an April meeting with FAA on Category 1; and a May meeting with the U.S. 17th Air Force of Africa Command to assist with a mock disaster drill and a workshop on runway maintenance, safety, and security. Regarding GON approval of U.S. Air Marshals, Omotoba reaffirmed that the Ministry is supportive and agreed to inquire why the National Security Agency has not moved forward with a decision. He stated that the Ministry needs additional assistance with airport scanners, especially luggage scanners. The Ambassador said she would have the Mission's INL officer discuss possibilities with his staff. End Summary.

Framework for Partnership

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador met with the new Minister of Aviation Babatunde Omotoba on March 5, with EconOff as notetaker. The Ambassador provided an overview of USG efforts in Nigeria noting that those objectives were based on four pillars that The GON's Seven Point Agenda, which is encompassed in the Mission's Framework for Partnership. She explained that the Aviation Safety and

Security Public Private Partnership (PPP) (reftel E) is part of this Framework for Partnership and the ultimate goal is to assist Nigeria in attaining FAA Category 1 certification by December 2009 (reftels G and D). Omotoba thanked the Ambassador for the USG's assistance and partnership to date. She shared with Omotoba that there is still a misunderstanding by a few operators in the civil aviation sector about Category 1 certification, Open Skies, and TSA requirement for Nigerian aircraft to fly direct to the U.S. She then provided the Minister with detailed explanation of all three areas. Omotoba admitted that there was confusion and thanked the Ambassador for her explanations as they helped clear up some of the confusion.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador and Omotoba agreed to move forward with an industry security meeting in March featuring speakers on security requirements from TSA; an April meeting featuring the FAA on Category 1 requirements for the regulator and the industry; and a May meeting with U.S. 17th Air Force of Africa Command to assist with a mock disaster drill and a workshop on runway maintenance, safety, and security.

Delta's New Routes

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14. (SBU) The Ambassador advocated for GON approval of two new routes for Delta Airlines from Abuja to Atlanta and Lagos to New York and explained that the multilateral Open Skies Agreement signed between the United States and Nigeria in 2000 grants traffic rights for carriers from both countries to fly into one another's territory. Omotoba said he understood the agreement, but that the GON will not approve new routes for Delta until the company improves its "very

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poor" customer service and provides "better planes" and service on the existing Lagos route. Omotoba complained that Nigerians were treated "badly," luggage was often delayed or lost, and the airplanes on the Atlanta/Lagos route were "old with no modern amenities and frayed and broken seats." He said he has flown extensively on U.S. carriers and knows that Delta has better planes, capable of better service, and should provide them on the Lagos to Atlanta route. Omotoba contended that Nigeria was getting planes from the "scrape heap." (Note: Delta's Senior Vice President for Network Planning Bob Cortelyou told EconOff, on the margins of the Ambassador's February 27 meeting, that Delta was flying Boeing 767-300ER with a business elite and economy configuration, reftel B.

Delta's fleet has over 100 Boeing 767s, which play a significant role in both Delta's U.S. domestic and international operations and route traffic and frequency dictate the type of plane that is selected for routes. Cortelyou said he selects the planes flown on the Lagos to Atlanta route and that if Delta bends on their current stand, it would set a "bad" precedent. It is not clear when flying Delta from Lagos whether all the planes used are 767s. End Note.) Omotoba said he appreciated the discussion about Delta and welcomed the Ambassador saying she would discuss with Delta his customer service concerns. Omotoba reported that he has talked with United Airlines (UA), has invited them to fly to Nigeria and UA had expressed interest.

More Assistance Requested

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15. (SBU) Omotoba commented that the GON needed more scanners, especially for luggage and asked if it would be possible to receive more assistance. The Ambassador noted the USG provided four scanners in 2008 at the Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, and Abuja international airports and that Kano and Port Harcourt airport scanners appeared to be unused. She said the Mission's INL officer will contact the Ministry to discuss the possibility of additional scanners; but the Ministry will need to report back on the activity and use of the Kano and Port Harcourt airport scanners.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador reported that in March 2009 TSA will complete a security inspection of the Abuja airport. Omotoba welcomed the inspection and will provide his Director of Safety and Technical Policy to coordinate the visit. Regarding GON approval of U.S. Air Marshals, Omotobareaffirmed that the Ministry is

supportive and agreed to inquire why the National Security Agency has not moved forward with a decision.

A Special Invitation

17. (SBU) The Ambassador delivered letters of invitation to Omotoba, the managing director of Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos, and the director general of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority from the U.S. Trade and Development Agency inviting them to the U.S. and Sub-Saharan Africa: Partners in Aviation Safety and Security Conference in Cape Town, South Africa on April 27 - 29, 2009. Omotoba said he would respond to the USTDA invitation soon.

Comment

18. (SBU) Aviation sector contacts had described Omotoba as "unfriendly" to foreign carriers and possibly in the "pocket" of its national carriers. To the contrary, we found him very pro-U.S. Omotoba has in fact spent extensive time in the U.S. living in Chicago and has family there. He was warm during the meeting and was especially pleased with the Ambassador's knowledge of his sector and the support that the USG has provided. He also is a graduate of the J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management - Northwestern University, Illinois. The Mission has spent a lot of time and resources engaging the GON on aviation cooperation. Omotoba and other GON officials happen to be ready to fully engage with the USG.

If the GON and domestic industry follow the steps set forth from both TSA and FAA, then they can expect substantial and sustainable progress towards improving safety and security and increasing aviation ties. We will continue discussions with Delta on its on going customer service issues with the Nigerian authorities and public.

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19. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.

SANDERS